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SUBJECT: PUBLICATION AND DISTRIBUTION POLICY REVISITED

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¶1. Summary. UNESCO briefed member states on July 16 on its new publications policy. The Director of UNESCO's Bureau of Public Information, Nino Munoz Gomez (BPI), explained to member states the measures taken to ensure the quality of UNESCO's publications. He met some considerable skepticism, most notably from the UK Delegation which questioned why the number of UNESCO publications had increased from 20-30 in 1974 to a planned 760 in the current biennium. End Summary.

¶2. UNESCO's Director General Matsuura (DG) published a directive on June 25 promulgating a new publication and distribution policy. The DG's move was a response to the uproar at the spring 2008 Executive Board over an External Auditor's report that asserted UNESCO had no meaningful publications policy and no quality control mechanism for ensuring its publications were up to standard. Member states were universally upset that the organization appeared to be wasting scarce resources on valueless publications.

¶3. An information meeting was held at UNESCO on July 16, 2008 to discuss the new Publication and Distribution Policy. Nino Munoz Gomez, Director of UNESCO's Bureau of Public Information, chaired the meeting, accompanied by Mr. Ian Denison of the Publications Unit, and Philipp Muller Wirth of the Promotion, Partnership and Branding Unit.

¶4. Munoz Gomez started by describing publications as being at the heart of UNESCO's mandate to share information. He said that BPI had made great efforts to review and correct their methodology, to improve their ability to deliver information, and to ensure that no embarrassing situations take place in the future. (Note: This was a reference to the External Auditor's report that UNESCO had burned thousands of copies of a history of Latin America rather than go to the trouble of moving them to a new warehouse. End Note.)

¶5. Munoz Gomez explained that a comprehensive Publication and Distribution Plan will be put into effect, addressing UNESCO's objectives, including: ensuring relevance to program priorities and targeting readership, maintaining cost efficiency, improving distribution strategies and determining expected impact, and measuring and evaluating results.

¶6. While only a relatively small number of delegations were present, (Lithuania, Japan, UK, South Africa, Morocco, Belgium, US, Mexico, Senegal, Thailand, India, Malaysia, Sweden, Philippines), all were pointed with questions to Munoz Gomez, letting him know that his office would be closely watched in the coming months.

¶7. The UK representative, noting that in 1974, there were only 20-30 publications planned during the biennium, remarked that the external auditor now expected some 1,500. Munoz Gomez replied that the number had now dropped to 760, as financial resources had decreased. Munoz Gomez said that one-half of the proposed publications were linked the Education Sector, and that the other sectors each took some 10-15 percent of the total. He also added that 70 percent of the planned publications were in English.

¶8. On the issue of quality control, Munoz Gomez said that only the experts in each sector can ensure quality control in the substance of the works. In answer to questions about storage and destruction, Munoz Gomez told the gathering that new print-on-demand technologies and high-level accountability for destruction decisions would make such episodes as that of the history books a thing of the past. Several comments focused on the idea of better quality and lesser numbers. The issue of non-European publishing contractors was also

raised, with specific reference to African contractors. There were also some comments regarding the poor quality of translations.

¶9. Other delegations raised the issue of "free" publications, as well as the possibility of distributing lists of publications and ordering via internet to avoid unnecessarily large print runs, particularly for use by delegations. Munoz Gomez answered by saying that the sectors decide whether a publication is "free" or not. He also said that it was not possible to compare previous publication numbers from past biennium, as the definitions had changed. On the subject of contractors, he said that he will be working with field offices to increase calls for tender from India and Africa.

¶10. Regarding evaluations, Munoz Gomez noted that carrying out these kinds of studies was extremely expensive. Finally, in answer to a question about the number of UNESCO books sold, Munoz Gomez said that only some 50,000 copies of books were sold - a surprisingly low number, and that the money went into a publication fund which is used to offset the cost of publishing other books.

¶11. Comment: The effort to put into place a long-overdue change in publication and distribution methodology and policy, will undoubtedly take some time as UNESCO's publication machine tries to re-invent itself for the future. At a minimum, the information meeting served to calm the waters a bit, as many delegations remained outraged over the book destruction fiasco last spring, as evidenced by their comments during the last Executive Board. End

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